

**HIV/AIDS in the Commonwealth**  
**Capacity Building Programmes – Facing the Reality of HIV/AIDS:**  
**Training, Managing and Motivating in Circumstances of High**  
**HIV/AIDS Prevalence**

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## Abstract

This article discusses the economic and social ramifications of AIDS using experience from a capacity building project in Zambia. The article provides insight for capacity building in a situation where HIV prevalence is high and the death toll is rising. Although the authors admit that there are no simple answers for teaching, training, managing, organizing and motivating employees in this circumstance, the Zambia case shows progress can only happen if there is a very flexible perspective.

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## **Economic and Social Ramifications of AIDS**

In a recent lecture, Peter Piot, Director of UNAIDS, reminded us that HIV/AIDS is one of the most “diabolical” ailments to afflict mankind.<sup>1</sup> Callisto Madavo, a Vice President at the World Bank, underscored that point when he stated “AIDS now poses the foremost threat to development in Africa.”<sup>2</sup> Projections for Africa that losses from HIV/AIDS will dwarf those from drought, war, and other calamities no longer seem extreme. Indeed, in many Commonwealth countries, losses are rising sharply and show few signs of decline.<sup>3</sup>

Massive efforts by a host of specialists have advanced our understanding of HIV/AIDS.<sup>4</sup> The topic of this essay, capacity building, fits within the growing literature on the economic and social impact of the AIDS epidemic.

Capacity building, which broadly encompasses efforts to increase “...the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of government performance,”<sup>5</sup> has been radically affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This was evident from our fieldwork in Zambia.

### **Capacity Building: An Example from Zambia**

In 1992, the authors began work on a technical assistance project in the ministry of finance in Zambia. A major goal of that project was to enhance the capacity of ministry officials to formulate and implement policies that would foster growth and development.<sup>6</sup> We worked directly on the project until mid-1996 and have remained in touch with subsequent developments through periodic visits to Zambia (the last in January 2000).

From the very start of our assignment, there was evidence of the growing impact of HIV/AIDS on the operations of the ministry. None of the problems had been anticipated when the project was formulated in August 1990. At that time, the plan was to send overseas each year a small number of qualified individuals for long-term graduate training. Some officials would be sent for shorter courses abroad, within the sub-region, or to local training institutes. There would also be on-the-job training by the project’s expatriate professionals.

These plans unraveled as absenteeism, morbidity, opportunism, and death took their toll. There were five difficulties. First, given the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zambia and the expected losses of trained personnel, the effective cost of long-term training evaluated over a 5-7 year

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<sup>1</sup> “AIDS: A Crisis in Development” Lecture to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Harvard Institute for International Development, Askwith Hall, Harvard University, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1999.

<sup>2</sup> C. Madavo, Keynote address, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1999, Lusaka, International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa.

<sup>3</sup> In *HIV/AIDS in Zambia* (September 1999, p.15), the ministry of health reports data showing the HIV prevalence among 15-19 year olds in two urban areas has fallen during the 1990s. Despite these data, the overall prevalence of HIV in the 15-49 age group has remained at around 20 percent throughout the 1990s with no indication yet that it is declining (*op.cit.* p.13). The epidemic has many years to run in Zambia. Data elsewhere in this volume show a similar situation in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

<sup>4</sup> This is illustrated by the recent World Bank study *Confronting AIDS* (World Bank 1999). It acknowledges input from over 135 professionals and cites more than 300 references, dozens of which are survey papers.

<sup>5</sup> Grindle 1997, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Hoover and McPherson (1999).

period doubled. Second, the loss of time and skilled personnel due to HIV/AIDS was having a major impact on the ability of the ministry to function effectively. Third, the losses seriously eroded the ministry's "institutional memory."<sup>7</sup> Fourth, as the organization responsible for implementing Zambia's economic reform program, the ministry was already over-loaded without the difficulties created by losses from HIV/AIDS. And fifth, dealing with counterproductive behavior such as absenteeism and theft proved a challenge.

As problems arising from HIV/AIDS intensified, we searched in vain for guidance from the literature. Whereas statistics had been published on the rising costs of HIV/AIDS for employers and workers, the broader ramifications of the problem for the workplace were being missed. The emphasis on prevention efforts, and the need for additional hiring and/or training to replace ill or deceased workers, neglected the underlying dynamics of the epidemic.<sup>8</sup> The research available gave no direction regarding the types of systemic changes needed to prevent productivity from falling.<sup>9</sup> Researchers were not coming to grips with the implications of a situation where large and growing numbers of workers know (or suspect) that their life spans are being dramatically shortened.

A number of questions arose. Under conditions where HIV prevalence is high and death from AIDS is rising, as in the ministry of finance in Zambia, why should we expect conventional approaches to training, managing, organizing and motivating workers to be valid? Shouldn't they be modified? How? What did capacity building mean in circumstances where many of those whose capacities are being enhanced will become debilitated and die? Why, for example, would HIV-positive workers respond to training opportunities in the same way as those with a "normal" life expectancy? How could long-term degree-based training be justified when the cost/benefit ratio is so high? Who would support such training? What management techniques apply when a growing number of workers have HIV/AIDS? How does the fact that the manager is HIV positive complicate the situation? What institutional or organizational changes (to goals, workflow, or operational procedures) will enable productivity within the ministry to be maintained? What actions are needed to offset declining motivation, low morale, and counterproductive behavior? On the latter point, are sanctions or inducements more appropriate? And looking ahead, we began to ask how the measures being used to deal with the problems created by HIV/AIDS would enable the ministry to eventually move beyond the epidemic without irreparably damaging personnel and social relations?

Although our efforts were confined to the ministry of finance, many of these same difficulties were evident throughout the entire civil service. That is, the problem of building (or in Zambia's case, maintaining) capacity affected the whole government.

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<sup>7</sup> This problem was noted in Kenya (*cf.* AIDSCAP 1996, p.116).

<sup>8</sup> This neglect is still evident in recent documents (World Bank 1999a, pp14-17)

<sup>9</sup> Some recent "Best Practices" literature has dealt with this issue (Loewenson *et al.* 1999). Companies have been making their human resource policies more "adaptable" by building in "buffers". These include flexible work-time, "multi-skill strategies" to widen the skill base, and work teams with continuous in-service training. UNAIDS (1999, pp.17-19) makes some of the same points. Yet it should be noted that the focus on "barriers" to action on responding to HIV/AIDS, noted in a recent World Bank study (World Bank 1999a, p.26), did *not* include the issues we have been emphasizing here.



## **Responding to the Rising Costs of Capacity Building**

Reflecting the reality of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Zambia, the capacity building program in the ministry of finance proceeded as though the broader trends would continue. As time has shown, the problems actually intensified. Economists often deal with situations where major constraints cannot be removed. They have developed a general set of principles, dubbed “second best”, to handle such problems. The relevant decision criteria involve a search over the constrained set to devise the “next best steps” towards the desired goals. When applied to the task of building capacity in the ministry of finance, that approach prompted several changes.

We immediately scaled back long-term training abroad. In order to minimize the use of external consultants, we contracted the staff of local training organizations to work with ministry officials to design a series of short-term courses relevant to broad categories of workers such as entry-level auditors, registry clerks, and senior accountants. These courses highlighted the types of information, techniques, and skills that ministry staff needed over the short term to help raise their productivity. One hazard of this approach became all-too-apparent when one of the key trainers died of AIDS.

The short-term courses had four useful effects. First, they responded to the need to raise skills throughout the ministry. Second, they created redundancy in the system as a means of minimizing workflow disruptions. Third, they demonstrated in a tangible way that *all* members of the ministry had a role in raising efficiency. Finally, they provided an opportunity for senior members within each staff category to interact with junior staff members. (This benefit has been an important way of spreading the “institutional memory” that was being lost with the premature deaths of older staff members.)

Another benefit of this training program, initially unanticipated, was its boost to morale. By training all members of particular groups we cut across former patterns of favoritism that denied training to many ministry staff, particularly women. We also provided an incentive for improved work performance by tying subsequent training to the results obtained in previous courses.

These adjustments were a pragmatic response to the ministry’s immediate problem. That response, however, was selective. It primarily dealt with short-term capacity needs without significantly deepening the ministry’s skill base. Because of its responsibility for the economic reform program, the ministry needed personnel with special technical and administrative skills. It also required some strategic thinkers who could understand the significance of the overall program and guide the ministry’s efforts. In response, the project organized several “executive” seminars and workshops both locally and abroad. These proved useful, but relative to the types of skills needed to raise the overall effectiveness of the ministry, the effort was inadequate. In the event, gaps in the ministry’s skill set were filled by technical assistants.

## Rethinking Losses in Capacity: Perceptions and Denial

The problems we have outlined above seemed so obvious that it remained a source of surprise to find that they had not been addressed by others.<sup>10</sup> Workers with HIV/AIDS don't have the luxury of time.<sup>11</sup> All their plans for the future have to fit within a short horizon. Yet, they do know that any sanctions they encounter (short of being fired) will be largely irrelevant. Why, we asked, were specialists in education and management not thinking of how to deal with these issues in ways that will enable organizations to continue functioning effectively?<sup>12</sup>

One answer to this question is that conventional "frames of reference" used by social and behavioral scientists typically exclude dealing with large segments of the population whose horizons have been prematurely foreshortened. It was Lavoissier who noted more than two centuries ago that our minds become "creased" in ways that make it difficult to view the world in different ways. This has evidently happened in the case of specialists in education, management, and organizational dynamics who could otherwise provide some guidance on these issues. Direct evidence that these matters do not fit conventional frames of reference is the most recent World Bank study *Confronting AIDS*. Despite its broad intellectual base, there is no mention of the need to modify ways in which workers with HIV/AIDS are trained, managed, motivated, or disciplined.

That study, however, does help explain why the matters have not been addressed -- namely denial.<sup>13</sup> This is not a new phenomenon when societies have experienced traumatic events (wars, riots) or processes (the HIV/AIDS epidemic). Scholars and practitioners dealing with HIV/AIDS on a day-to-day basis understand that denial has allowed the epidemic to intensify. Yet, there are many reasons why denial has been widespread. Governments and business associations have been hesitant to admit HIV/AIDS is a problem because of its potentially adverse effects on tourism, foreign investment, or racial and ethnic sensitivities.<sup>14</sup> Politicians and journalists have boxed themselves in by years of silence or obfuscation. For example, it would have been impossible for President Chiluba of Zambia to attend the September 1999 international conference on AIDS and STDs in Lusaka without drawing attention to his lukewarm concern for

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<sup>10</sup> In a series of articles, Cohen (1997, 1998) has highlighted the dynamic effects of HIV/AIDS on actions needed to deal with poverty, with the maintenance of education standards, and sustaining "development" itself. Of relevance to this essay, he argued that changes in age and skill structure as the AIDS epidemic matures would place new demands on the education system.

<sup>11</sup> Although it is treated cursorily, the problem was at least recognized in the case study of Muzumbuka (*cf* World Bank 1999a, p.54).

<sup>12</sup> McPherson raised these issues during the capacity building sessions at HIID's Bermuda conference in March 1995. They clearly made no impression. The published record of that conference (Grindle 1997) shows that none of the other capacity building specialists who present papers understood that the problems created by HIV/AIDS required them to re-think their fundamental approaches.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank 1999, pp.44 ff, Ch.6

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that the National Business Initiative, with 186 of South Africa's major businesses, produced its 1998/99 annual report with no mention that HIV/AIDS was an issue affecting any aspect of business. One of the NBI's goals has been to give its "member companies the opportunity to become involved in credible frameworks to address some of South Africa's most pressing socioeconomic problems." (NBI Annual Report 1998/99, p.18). Evidently, HIV/AIDS is not considered among these problems.

the HIV/AIDS problem throughout the seven years of his presidency.<sup>15</sup> During that period, more than 500,000 Zambian children had become AIDS orphan.<sup>16</sup>

The costs of denial are enormous. Hundreds of thousands more people will die. But incredibly, the denial continues. A report in December 1999 on improving the efficiency of Zambia's finance ministry recommended a major reorganization. The report totally ignored the damage done by HIV/AIDS. Ironically, in many cases the proposed reorganization would involve rearranging positions that are now empty.<sup>17</sup>

## **Recommendations and Reflections**

Our work on capacity building provided a number of lessons and raised several questions. The first lesson is that capacity building activities need to be flexible. Once it was realized that the problems facing the ministry were not those anticipated when the project was formulated, the training effort was refocused. The second lesson is that using local training institutes yields special advantages. They can custom design local courses and provide the necessary follow up. Moreover, supporting their operations helps create the capacity needed to continue valuable capacity building efforts once donor-funded projects end. The third lesson is that there is much more to be learned about training, managing, and motivating staff when HIV/AIDS is at epidemic proportions.

There are many ways that these lessons can be expanded. Most organizations operating under circumstances where HIV/AIDS prevalence is high recognize the advantages of flexibility in work schedules and work patterns and the benefits of redundancy. Using local institutes to create capacity moves African countries, despite the losses due to HIV/AIDS, one step closer to the time when they can progress beyond the epidemic.

A further implication of the lessons is that specialists need to begin looking at the problem from different perspectives. Herculean efforts have been made so far to induce people not to engage in risky behavior (or to protect themselves if they do) and, following such activities, not to put others at risk. More attention is now needed to understand the motivations and constraints of those who already are HIV positive or suspect they are. In most Commonwealth countries, these individuals lack access to subsidized treatment and therefore face certain death. At issue is the possibility of remaining productive during the time they have left. Our work has shown that properly trained, managed, and motivated, these individuals can remain effective and productive members of the work force. We have found that productivity can be boosted by universal short-term training in specially designed courses. One outcome of this training is the transfer of knowledge and skills. An equally important outcome is the concurrent boost to morale.

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<sup>15</sup> In its series "AIDS and the African" *The Boston Globe* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1999) point to Chiluba's absence as an indication of the "official silence" that has allowed HIV/AIDS to gain such momentum in Africa.

<sup>16</sup> *HIV/AIDS in Zambia* 1999, p.35

<sup>17</sup> "Restructuring Report," Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Zambia, December 1999

## **Concluding Comments**

For many Commonwealth countries the dynamics of the HIV/AIDS epidemic will make it a serious development problem for the foreseeable future. Large numbers of workers (skilled and unskilled) with HIV/AIDS will face the challenge of making the most of their foreshortened lives.

There are no easy answers to the question of what modifications are needed in teaching and training, managing and organizing, and motivating and inspiring when large numbers of those involved (including those who teach, manage, and motivate) have HIV/AIDS. Our work in Zambia has shown that progress in these areas is possible once we change our perspectives.

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